

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-15 SAB-02 IO-14 /088 W

-----033485 021755Z /43

P R 021520Z DEC 77

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4744

INFO PANCANAL

USCINCSO

UNCLAS PANAMA 8592

DEPT FOR ARA/PAF AND PAN

USCINCSO FOR J-2 AND PAO

PANCANAL FOR IO

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOPN, PN

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTIONS

1- PANAMA CITY.--TWO U.S. SENATORS EXPRESSED THEIR DOUBTS REGARDING THE NEW PANAMA CANAL TREATIES IN A PRESS CONFERENCE THIS MORNING IN THE CANAL ZONE AFTER A THREE DAY VISIT TO PANAMA. SENATE MINORITY WHIP THEODORE STEVENS, REPUBLICAN OF ALASKA, AND SENATOR THOMAS EAGLETON, DEMOCRAT OF MISSOURI WERE BOTH CRITICAL OF THE TREATIES AND BOTH PREDICTED THAT THE AGREEMENTS WOULD NOT BE RATIFIED BY THE SENATE IN THEIR PRESENT FORM.

2-IN THIS OPENING REMARKS, SENATOR STEVENS SAID: "I AM ONE OF THOSE WHO IS OPPOSED TO THESE TREATIES AS THEY ARE DRAFTED TODAY. I DO BELIEVE THAT IT MAY BE POSSIBLE TO AMEND THEM TO MEET SOME OF THE PROBLEMS THAT I SEE WITH THEM."

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3-SENATOR EAGLETON WAS LESS CRITICAL OF THE TREATIES THAN HIS COLLEAGUE FROM ALASKA, HOWEVER HE WAS QUICK TO FORECAST A DIFFICULT TIME FOR THE ACCORDS IN THE SENATE. AS FOR HIS PERSONAL POSITION EAGLETON SAID: "I HAVEN'T FINALLY MADE UP MY MIND AS TO HOW I'LL VOTE. I CAN THINK OF A COUPLE OF AREAS WHERE I THINK THE TREATIES NEED TO BE AMENDED, CAN BE AMENDED AND PROBABLY WILL BE AMENDED AND PERHAPS IF ENOUGH AMENDMENTS TO

TIDY UP THIS THAT OR ANOTHER PASSAGE OF THE TREATY ARE ADDED TO IT, IT MAY BE ABLE TO MUSTER THE TWO-THIRDS VOTE. MY OWN PERSONAL SPECULATION IS THAT AT THE PRESENT TIME THERE IS NOWHERE NEAR THE 67-SENATOR LEVEL IN SUPPORT OF THE TREATIES AS NOW DRAFTED."

4-WHEN ASKED WHAT PROBLEMS HE SAW WITH THE TREATIES, SENATOR STEVENS REPLIED: "FOR MYSELF,THE SECURITY ASPECTS OF THE TREATIES ARE AMBIGUOUS. THE PRIORITY PASSAGE FOR AMERICAN NAVAL VESSLES IS AMBIGUOUS. THAT'S BEEN ACKNOWLEDGED BY THE STATEMENT FROM PRESIDENT CARTER AND GENERAL TORRIJOS. I THINK THERE ARE OTHER AMBIGUITIES IN THESE TREATIES; I FOR ONE DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHY THERE IS A PROVISION THAT PREVENTS US FROM DISCUSSING A NEW CANAL WITH ANOTHER GOVERNMENT OR PREVENTS THE PANAMANIAN FROM DISCUSSING A SEA-LEVEL CANAL WITH OTHER INVESTORS, A NEW CANAL IN PANAMA, I DON'T UNDERSTAND THAT PROVISION. BUT THE PROBLEM I HAVE IS I THINK THERE'S ENOUGH ROOM FOR MISUNDERSTANDING IN THE DRAFTING OF THE TREATIES TO CAUSE TROUBLE FOR LATER GENERATIONS."

5-SENATORS STEVENS AND EAGLETON, TRAVELING WITH THEIR WIVES, ARRIVED TUESDAY MORNING ON THE PANAMA CANAL COMPANY SHIP, SS CRISTOBAL, AND WILL DEPART THIS AFTERNOON ON THE SAME VESSEL FOR NEW ORLEANS.
JORDEN

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